

EXHIBIT 11

THE HISTORIAN'S CRAFT

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even that of Niebuhr with any of those short summaries we read today. The former draw the heart of their matter from Livy, Suetonius, or Florus. The latter are constructed in large measure out of inscriptions, papyri, and coins. Only in this way could whole sections of the past have been reconstructed. This is true of all prehistory, as well as of almost all economic history and almost all history of social structures. Even in the present, who among us would not prefer to get hold of a few secret chancellery papers or some confidential military reports, to having all the newspapers of 1938 or 1939?

It is not that this sort of document is any less subject to errors or falsehoods than the others. There are plenty of fraudulent bulls, and neither all ambassadorial accounts nor all business letters tell the truth. But this kind of distortion, if it exists, at least, has not been especially designed to deceive posterity. Moreover, these tracks which the past unwittingly leaves all along its trail do more than simply permit us to fill in the narrative where it is missing and to check it where its truthfulness is suspected. They protect our studies from a peril more deadly than either ignorance or inaccuracy: that of an incurable sclerosis. Indeed, without their aid, every time the historian turned his attention to the generations gone by, he would become the inevitable prey of the same prejudices, false inhibitions, and myopias which had plagued the vision of those who came before him. For Document 362-12

ists would accord but a trivial significance to communal development, under the pretext that the writers of the Middle Ages did not discuss it freely with their public, or would disregard the mighty force of religious life for the good reason that it occupied a much less important place in contemporary narrative literature than the wars of the barons. In a word, to resort to a favorite figure of Michelet's, history would become less the ever-daring explorer of the ages past than the eternally unmoving pupil of their "chronicles."

Moreover, even when most anxious to bear witness, that which the text tells us expressly has ceased to be the primary object of our attention today. Ordinarily, we prick up our ears far more eagerly when we are permitted to overhear what was never intended to be said. What do we find most instructive in the works of Saint-Simon? Is it their frequently fictitious news of the events of the reign, or the remarkable light which the *Memoirs* throw upon the mentality of a great noble at the court of the Sun King? At least three fourths of the lives of the saints of the high Middle Ages can teach us nothing concrete about those pious personages whose careers they pretend to describe. If, on the other hand, we consult them as to the way of life or thought peculiar to the epoch in which they were written (all things which the biographer of the saint had not the least intention of revealing), we shall find them invaluable. Despite our inevitable subordination to the past, we have freed ourselves at last from the fatal error of regarding it as a dead weight. For Document 362-12

only by means of its "tracks," we are nevertheless successful in knowing far more of the past than the past itself had thought good to tell us. Properly speaking, it is a glorious victory of mind over its material.

But from the moment when we are no longer resigned to purely and simply recording the words of our witnesses, from the moment we decide to force them to speak, even against their will, cross-examination becomes more necessary than ever. Indeed, it is the prime necessity of well-conducted historical research.

Many people and, it appears, even some authors of manuals entertain an extraordinarily simplified notion of our working procedure. First, as they are only too eager to tell you, there are the documents. The historian collects them, reads them, attempts to weigh their authenticity and truthfulness. Then, and only then, he makes use of them. There is only one trouble with this idea: no historian has ever worked in such a way, even when, by some caprice, he fancied that he was doing so.

For even those texts or archæological documents which seem the clearest and the most accommodating will speak only when they are properly questioned. Before Boucher de Perthes, as in our own day, there was plenty of flint artifacts in the alluvium of the Somme. However, there was no one to ask questions, and there was therefore no prehistory. As an old medie-

valist, I know nothing which is better reading than a cartulary. That is because I know just about what to ask it. A collection of Roman inscriptions, on the other hand, would tell me little. I know more or less how to read them, but not how to cross-question them. In other words, every historical research supposes that the inquiry has a direction at the very first step. In the beginning, there must be the guiding spirit. Mere passive observation, even supposing such a thing were possible, has never contributed anything productive to any science.

Indeed, we must here make no mistake. It may well be that the cross-examination remains purely instinctive. It is there, nevertheless. Without the scholar's being aware of it, its dictates are etched into his brain by the convictions and inhibitions of his former experiences, by means of tradition and by means of common sense, which is too often to say by means of vulgar prejudices. We are never quite so receptive as we should like to believe. There is no worse advice for a beginner than that he should simply sit patiently waiting for the inspiration of a document. Such conduct has betrayed more than one well-intended inquiry into either stalemate or checkmate.

Naturally, the method of cross-examination must be very elastic, so that it may change its direction or improvise freely for any contingency, yet be able, from the outset, to act as a magnet drawing findings out of the document. Even when he has settled his itiner-

look of amazement. "Extraordinary! You don't even seem to mind this awful uncertainty!" My friend could have answered that, despite the popular prejudice, the mental climate of research is not so unsympathetic to ready acceptance of the lottery of fate.

A while ago we asked whether there is an antithesis of technique between knowledge of the past and of the present. The answer has already been given. Certainly, the explorers of the present and those of remoter times have each their particular way of handling their tools. Moreover, both have their advantages, depending on the particular case. The former have a more tangible grasp of life; but the latter in their investigations command means which are often denied to the first. Thus, the dissection of a cadaver discloses to the biologist many secrets which the study of a living subject would fail to reveal, but is mute about many others which are evident only in the living body. But, to whatever age of mankind the scholar turns, the methods of observation remain almost uniformly dependent upon "tracks," and are, therefore, fundamentally the same. So, too, as we shall see, are those critical rules which observation must obey if it is to be fruitful.

CHAPTER III

HISTORICAL CRITICISM

1. *An Outline of the History of the Critical Method*

THE MOST naïve policeman knows that a witness should not always be taken at his word, even if he does not always take full advantage of this theoretical knowledge. Similarly, it has been many a day since men first took it into their heads not to accept all historical evidence blindly. An experience almost as old as mankind has taught us that more than one manuscript has falsified its date or origin, that all the accounts are not true, and that even the physical evidences can be faked. In the Middle Ages, in the face of an abundance of forgeries, doubt was frequently a natural defensive reflex. "With ink, anyone can write anything." Thus exclaimed an eleventh-century country squire of Lorraine in reference to some monks who had armed themselves in a lawsuit against him with documentary proofs. The Donation of Constantine—that extraordinary literary concoction which a Roman cleric of the eighth century ascribed to the first Christian emperor—was contested, three centuries later, in the circle of the eminently pious Otto III. False relics have been hunted down almost from the first. However, skepticism on principle is neither a more

estimable nor a more productive intellectual attitude than the credulity with which it is frequently blended in the simpler minds. In the first war, I knew a worthy veterinarian who, with some justification, refused categorically to believe anything in the newspapers. Yet the fellow swallowed hook, line, and sinker the most nonsensical hocus-pocus which any chance companion might pour in his eager ear.

Similarly, the criticism of ordinary common sense, for long the only one in use, and still somehow seductive to certain minds, cannot lead very far. In reality, this pretended common sense usually turns out to be nothing more than a compound of irrational postulates and hastily generalized experiences. As regards the physical world, it has denied the existence of the antipodes. It still denies the Einsteinian universe. It treated as mere legend Herodotus' tale reporting that, when turning the coast of Africa, the navigators saw the point from which the sun rises pass from their left to their right. As it regards human actions, on the other hand, the worst of common sense is that it exalts to the level of the eternal observations necessarily borrowed from our own brief moment of time. This is the principal vice of the Voltairian criticism, which is so penetrating in other respects. Above and beyond the peculiarities of individuals of every age, there are states of mind which were formerly common, yet which appear peculiar to us because we no longer share them. "Common sense," it seems, would refuse to accept the idea that Emperor Otto I could have

signed, in favor of the Pope, grants of territories which could never be made good, since they both belied his former actions and were ignored in those that followed. Since his grant was incontestably authentic, however, we are forced to believe that his mentality was different from ours and, more particularly, that there was in his time a gap between words and deeds which surprises us today.

True progress began on the day when, as Volney put it, doubt became an "examiner"; or, in other words, when there had gradually been worked out objective rules which permitted the separation of truth from falsehood. The Jesuit Papebroeck, in whom the reading of *The Lives of the Saints* had instilled a profound mistrust of the entire heritage of the early Middle Ages, considered all the Merovingian charters which had been preserved in the monasteries as forgeries. No, replied Mabillon. There are unquestionably some charters which have been retouched, some which have been interpolated, and some which have been forged in their entirety. There are also some which are authentic, and this is how it is possible to distinguish the bad from the good. That year, 1681, the year of the publication of the *De Re Diplomatica*, was truly a great one in the history of the human mind, for the criticism of the documents of archives was definitely established.

Moreover, it was in every respect the decisive moment in the history of the critical method. The hu-